

fied by Prof. Baird according to the system prevailing in the United States, the locality of each specimen being given. None of the species appears to call for any special comment; but the list adds to our knowledge of the distribution of North-American birds, a subject which our Transatlantic brethren have long laboured at with great industry and success.

51. *Major Godwin-Austen's List of Birds from the Hills of the North-east Frontier of India.*

[Fifth List of Birds from the Hill Ranges of the North-east Frontier of India. By Major H. H. Godwin-Austen, F.R.G.S. &c. (J. A. S. B. xlv. pt. 2, p. 191.)]

A list of the birds collected by officers of the Topographical Survey of India in the Munipur and Nágá hills, and by Major Godwin-Austen himself in the Khási hills, is given in this paper, which adds another to the useful series of memoirs Major Godwin-Austen has published on the birds of these remote districts. Most of the new species obtained during these expeditions have already been described in this Journal (*Ibis*, 1875, p. 250 *et seqq.*) and elsewhere; but others are characterized in this article. Thus we have a new *Alcippe* from the Nágá hills allied to *A. hueti* of Père David, and called *A. fusca*, and *Neornis albiventris*, a new Warbler from the Munipur valley, allied to *N. assimilis*, Hodgs. Three species are figured (plates v., vi., vii.), viz. *Acridotheres albocincta*, *Sphenocichla roberti*, and *Pyctorhis altirostris*.

XXXIII.—*Letters, Announcements, &c.*

The following letters, addressed "To the Editors of 'The Ibis,'" have been received:—

SIRS,—In 1875 the Asiatic Society of Bengal did me the honour of intrusting to me the task of editing the posthumous Catalogue of the Birds of Burma written by Mr. Blyth. While in no degree underrating the responsibility of the duty I was asked to perform, I accepted the trust with some confidence, because Mr. Blyth, not very long before

his lamented death, had gone through all his manuscript with me at Chislehurst, and, while inviting the freest criticism, only made such alterations as he was satisfied in his mind were well founded. It is needless to say that I had but few corrections to suggest, and that Mr. Blyth exhibited all that accuracy, acuteness, and retentive power of memory for which he was so remarkable. In the Catalogue as it now appears in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, all the additions or observations made by me are enclosed in brackets, as stated by Mr. Grote in his introduction.

On page 114, at no. 359, it will be found that Mr. Blyth identified *Pellorneum subochraceum*, Swinhoe, with his own species, *Pellorneum tickelli*, Blyth. Knowing that Mr. Blyth would not hazard such an identification without good grounds, and as I had never seen the type of *P. tickelli*, Blyth, I felt bound, as his editor, to accept Mr. Blyth's views concerning his own species; and I therefore allowed the synonymy, as set forth by Mr. Blyth, to stand without alteration or remark. I felt that it would be somewhat presumptuous in me, without the type specimen in my own hand, to assume that Mr. Blyth did not know a species described by himself. I consequently accepted the title *P. subochraceum*, Swinhoe, it being of more recent date, as a synonym of *P. tickelli*, Blyth.

In 1873 Mr. Hume described (Str. F. i. p. 298) a species of *Pellorneum* from Thayetmyo under the title of *P. minor*. This is undoubtedly the same bird as *P. subochraceum*, Swinhoe (Ann. N. H. ser. 4, 1871, vii. p. 257). In the Catalogue, no. 360, I therefore remarked that *P. minor*, Hume, was "a synonym of *P. tickelli*," accepting that title on Mr. Blyth's authority as being equal, though older, to *P. subochraceum*. That *P. minor*, Hume, was not a distinct species (I happened to possess a large series collected by Lieutenant W. Ramsay), that it had been described two years previously by Mr. Swinhoe, was, while not a matter of great surprise, beyond all doubt when I wrote. But Mr. Oates has recently (Str. F. 1876, p. 406) endeavoured to show that I, not Mr. Blyth, have "made a strange mistake" in identifying *P. tickelli* with *P. minor*, or, in other words, with *P. subochraceum*. I do not admit that Mr. Blyth was wrong in his identification of *P.*

subochraceum with *P. tickelli*; for, with the greatest respect to the superior knowledge of Mr. Oates, I am inclined (perhaps from mere editorial partiality) to believe that Mr. Blyth was as likely to know as much, I will not say more, about the specimen and species he himself had described, than even Mr. Oates, who had never seen it. But if there is an error on my part in referring *P. minor*, Hume, through *P. subochraceum*, Swinhoe, to *P. tickelli*, Blyth, it must be Mr. Blyth's "dictum," and not mine, "that will not be readily accepted by those who are conversant with local Indian ornithology."

Mr. Oates speaks confidently of having seen and shot *P. tickelli*, Blyth, on the Pegu hills. Mr. Hume, in his "List of the Birds of Upper Pegu" (*op. cit.* 1875, p. 119), goes no further than to "suppose" that the only specimen sent to him by Mr. Oates belongs to *P. tickelli*; and Mr. Oates (*l. c.*) remarks that that "specimen agrees pretty well with Blyth's meagre description." But when it becomes an object to impress on the readers of 'Stray Feathers' that I, in my capacity of Mr. Blyth's editor, have arrived "at hasty and, in many cases, erroneous conclusions," then the fact that it was Mr. Blyth, and not I, who identified his own species with one that is notoriously the same as *P. minor*, is omitted, Mr. Hume's bare "supposition" becomes a demonstrated fact, and "Blyth's meagre description," with which Mr. Oates's solitary specimen only "agrees pretty well," is considered, along with Tickell's (which is as meagre, and was also before Mr. Oates), "to give us all the really essential particulars of the plumage."

But, Sir, what will probably more interest you and your readers is, whether I was justified in treating the title of *P. minor*, Hume (*lege minus*), as a synonym of some previously described species. Upon this point there is no doubt; for I have taken the trouble to again examine the type of *P. subochraceum*.

I remain, yours,

TWEEDDALE.

Chislehurst, April 26, 1877.

SIRS,—In my additional notes to Mr. Blyth's "Catalogue of the Birds of Burma," when dealing with *Otothrix hodgsoni*, I gave a bare list of all the species of the genus *Batrachostomus* then known to inhabit the Indian region, and their synonymy. With regard to two species I simply wrote "no. 2. *B. affinis*, Blyth, = *P. parvulus*, Tem., = *B. castaneus*, Hume," and "no. 3. *B. moniliger*, Layard, = *B. punctatus*, Hume." For these identifications of two of Mr. Hume's new (?) species "the editor of the ornithological part" (*sic*) "of Blyth's Birds of Burma" (*Str. F.* iv. p. 376) has been assailed by Mr. Hume with a fretful levity and poverty of analytical perception which would have rendered it unnecessary for me to notice his remarks, had not Mr. Blanford addressed you a letter on the subject, published in the April number of 'The Ibis' (*anteà*, p. 249); for it need hardly be said that I receive opinions formed by Mr. Blanford on ornithological questions with the respect that those who know him personally or through his writings cannot fail to entertain.

The general conclusions I had arrived at (*l. c.*) were formed after repeated and anxious study of a comprehensive series of specimens and of the literature on the subject. But Mr. Blanford, I observe, makes a statement so diametrically at variance with one of my principal conclusions that, if it can be established*, my assertion (*l. c.*) that *B. castaneus*, Hume, = *B. affinis*, Blyth, must be erroneous. Its accuracy or inaccuracy turns on the fundamental question, What is *B. affinis*, Blyth? Mr. Blanford asserts that "conspicuous white spots" "occur on the wing-coverts of *B. affinis*" (*l. c.*), and that the "feathers of the breast and abdomen are pale isabelline, with rufous edges, which are broader on the breast," but that "in *B. castaneus* the greater portion of the lower surface is the same colour as the back, chestnut; but many feathers on the throat, breast, and upper abdomen are white,

* [Since this letter has been in type we have received a letter from Mr. Blanford requesting that his former letter (already published in our last number, p. 249) should be cancelled. He has "looked at one of Blyth's types of *Batrachostomus*, and found that Lord Tweeddale is right and Mr. Hume wrong!"—EDD.]

with black margins." Now, on the other hand, Blyth distinctly stated, in his original description of *B. affinis* (J. A. S. B. 1847, p. 1180), that it "has no white spots on the wing," that the "throat and breast" are "plain rufous, with a few white feathers, having a subterminal dusky border on the fore neck and sides of the breast." Mr. Blyth introduces *B. affinis* as being "very similar to *B. javensis* in the plumage figured by Horsfield" (Zool. Res. Java, t. 37)—that is, with unspotted wings—but "smaller." Again, two years later (*op. cit.* 1849, p. 807), Mr. Blyth, when detailing the characters which distinguish *B. moniliger*, Layard, from *P. javensis*, Horsf. apud Blyth (nec Horsf., sed = *P. stellatus*, Gould, = *B. stictopterus*, Cab.), and from *B. affinis*, remarks:—"the bright white spots on the wings" (of *B. moniliger*) "distinguish it as readily from *B. affinis*." Indeed it is the uniform chestnut-coloured unspotted wing which at once distinguishes *B. affinis*, Blyth (when in rufous plumage), from both *B. moniliger*, Layard, ex Ceylon, and *B. javensis*, Horsf. apud Blyth, ex Malacca, nec Horsf. It is essential to the argument to bear in mind that the larger of the two Malaccan forms (I am excluding *B. auritus*) is the bird always referred to as *B. javensis*, Horsf., by Blyth, except where he quotes Horsfield's plate (Zool. Res. Java), and that Blyth, like every one else, until Dr. Cabanis discriminated and clearly described the Malaccan species (for Mr. Gould's diagnosis is too vague, and he gave Java as the habitat), assumed the latter to belong to the same species as the Javan bird. The Malaccan bird, *B. stellatus* = *B. stictopterus*, has spotted wing-coverts in both its rufous and brown phases of plumage (♀ ♂ ?); and from Mr. Blanford's clear descriptive remarks, it is evidently the species identified by him in Mr. Hume's museum as belonging to *B. affinis*, Blyth. It is a bird of which examples occur in almost every Malaccan collection of any importance, either in the bright rufous or in the brown phase of plumage, while *B. affinis* does not appear to be so common. The difference in the width of the gape noted by Mr. Blanford is just the difference observable between the gape of *P. javensis*, apud Blyth, ex Malacca (= *P. stellatus*, Gould), and *B. affinis*, Blyth.

Mr. Blanford inadvertently makes a slip when he states (p. 253) that "the fragments of two specimens of *Batrachostomus*, from Darjeeling, briefly described by Mr. Blyth in 1849 (J. A. S. B. xviii. p. 806), were at first referred by him to *B. affinis* ; but subsequently, in his 'Catalogue of the Birds in the Museum of the Asiatic Society,' p. 31, he ascribed them to 'a nearly allied but distinct species.'" The facts are exactly the reverse. Mr. Blyth announced the receipt of the fragments from Darjeeling and his opinion, above quoted, *first*, and not "subsequently," in the Catalogue. Afterwards, in his "Supplemental note to the Catalogue of the Birds in the Asiatic Society's Museum" (J. A. S. B. 1849, p. 806. no. 405, paper quoted by Mr. Blanford), no. 405, being the number under which *B. affinis* stands in the 'Catalogue,' Mr. Blyth published his matured opinion along with a description of the two specimens. His words are, "two specimens of what we now consider to be the young of this species" (*B. affinis*). If this were not a slip, Mr. Blanford's version would deprive me of the support of one of the many facts which led me to the inference that *B. castaneus*, Hume, = *B. affinis*, Blyth. Mr. Blyth's last-published opinion about *B. affinis* is contained in a footnote to page 83 (B. Burma), where he alludes to *B. affinis* being "probably *Otothrix hodgsoni*, G. R. Gray, if the two really differ." Malaccan examples of *B. affinis*, in grey and brown spotted dress, are difficult to distinguish from the type of *O. hodgsoni* ; but I did not venture to identify (B. Burma, no. 162) Gray's species with *B. affinis* and *B. castaneus* in the face of Mr. Hume's positive statement (Str. F. ii. p. 349) that "Mr. Hodgson's bird" (type of *O. hodgsoni*) "was certainly an adult female by dissection ;" for Lieutenant W. Ramsay (B. Burma, no. 162) had determined by dissection that the sex of a species of *Batrachostomus*, ex Burma, hardly differing from *O. hodgsoni*, was a male. This statement Mr. Hume has now reduced to "It is true, when I formerly wrote, I thought it (relying upon what Hodgson recorded) probable that *hodgsoni* was the female" (Str. F. iv. p. 378). The certainty of the fact arrived at by Mr. Hodgson after dissection, as first stated by Mr. Hume, being thus minimized

to only a probability, and in the absence of the exact words used by Mr. Hodgson when recording the fact of having dissected the bird (if any such exist), there need be little hesitation in now reframing the synonymy of the species thus :—*B. affinis*, Blyth, = *Podargus parvulus*, Temm., = *Otothrix hodgsoni*, G. R. Gray, = *B. castaneus*, Hume.

But the key-stone of Mr. Blanford's contention is the statement that the three specimens in Mr. Hume's collection, of what Mr. Blanford identifies with *B. affinis* (but which I venture to contend are *B. javensis*, apud Blyth, = *B. stellatus* = *B. stictopterus*) "have been compared with Blyth's original type in Calcutta." I do not quite gather whether Mr. Blanford himself personally compared Mr. Hume's three specimens with the type of *B. affinis*, or whether Mr. Blanford accepted the correctness of the identification at second hand. Will Mr. Blanford kindly investigate the history of the specimen he alludes to as being Mr. Blyth's type of *B. affinis*? Mr. Blyth described the species from a Malaccan skin obtained through Mr. Frith in 1847. If my own personal knowledge of *B. javensis*, apud Blyth (dating back, and continued since, some thirty years), and if the published descriptions and remarks of Mr. Blyth did not irresistibly oblige me to doubt the authenticity of the specimen Mr. Blanford (as described by him) accepts as the type of *B. affinis*, I would refrain from asking him to take the trouble of re-examining it. If it be the type specimen of *B. affinis*, what is *B. javensis*, apud Blyth, ex Malacca? for neither *B. javensis*, Horsf., nor its ally, *Podargus cornutus*, Temm., occur in Malacca, so far as is at present known.

Mr. Blanford further states his opinion that *B. punctatus*, Hume, is distinct from *B. moniliger*, Layard. Specimens of a species of *Batrachostomus*, from Travancore, are identified by Mr. Hume with *B. moniliger*, a species described from a Ceylon example, while *B. punctatus*, Hume, ex Ceylon, is assumed not to belong to *B. moniliger*, but to be a new species. Four phases of *B. moniliger* are represented in my series of *Batrachostomi* ex Ceylon; and one of the phases, that assumed by the almost adult male, agrees, feather for feather, with Mr. Hume's detailed description. Mr. Hume's single example and type

was obtained from Mr. H. Nevill; so were some of my specimens, and another from Malabar is in the British Museum. Yet Mr. Hume remarks, "I do not think that the learned editor in question should have so positively asserted what he had no means of verifying" (Str. F. 1876, p. 377). If Mr. Bourdillon's Travancore examples specifically differ from the Ceylon *B. moniliger*, they, not the Ceylon bird, require a new title; but the male, as described by Mr. Hume, but slightly differs from a Ceylon male of *B. moniliger* in my collection. I trust, Sir, whether my argument appears to you convincing or not, that it will enable my fellow Members of the B. O. U., and whose favourable opinion I prize, to judge of the scientific value of the criticism contained in the following reckless passage Mr. Hume has ventured to print (*l. c.*):—"It does seem a pity that such very erroneous assertions [that *B. castaneus* = *B. affinis*, and that *B. punctatus* = *B. moniliger*] "should be put forward so authoritatively without the remotest apparent grounds." Is it uncharitable to suggest that "grounds" which may not be apparent to Mr. Hume may yet be self-evident to any ornithologist who takes the trouble to acquire the rudiments of the subject on which he professes to instruct others?

I remain yours,

Chislehurst, May 16, 1877.

TWEEDDALE.

P.S. Mr. Blanford (*l. c.*) mentions a specimen of an adult (*B. sp.*) in Mr. Hume's possession, ex Sikim, "closely agreeing in general coloration with the figure of *Otothrix hodgsoni*," as being "marked female." Is this the same example alluded to by Mr. Hume (*op. cit.* ii. p. 349), the only one of his four "noted as a female, with a note of interrogation," by its collector, Mr. W. Mason? If it is not, we have some evidence of dimorphism in *B. affinis*. If it be the same individual, the note of interrogation must have escaped Mr. Blanford's attention.—T.

SIRS,—Mr. W. R. S. Ralston has kindly called my attention to an account of the Petchora expedition of our friends Messrs. Seebohm and Harvie Brown which lately appeared in the correspondence of the 'Novoe Vremya' or 'New Times'

of St. Petersburg; and I think a few extracts, translated by Mr. F. C. Craemers, will amuse and interest stay-at-home members of the B. O. U. After alluding to one or two former travellers, the writer comes to "Messrs. John Brown & Co.," of whom he reports as follows:—

"The principal object of the foreigners appears to have been the formation of a large collection of skins of all species of Birds and Mammals, and also to obtain a large series of eggs. They showed such great carefulness in their work that they minutely examined the smallest differences between specimens of one and the same species, and used every endeavour to obtain examples of all the species and varieties The inquisitive and *naïve* Petchora people relate that before shooting a bird, the English travellers carefully examined it through a telescope or some other optical instrument, then they fired. They spent several months in the Petchora country, and were evidently satisfied with their expedition, having obtained nearly 1000 specimens of birds and beasts and also a great number of eggs—very solid material for a scientific zoologist. They also discovered a new species of bird (belonging, if I mistake not, to the Sandpiper tribe), which according to them, does not occur in Europe or America, rich as they are in animal life.

"Judging from the statements of the people, these foreigners seem to have made a very favourable impression by their liberal payment for specimens collected for them, and by the good works in which they appear to have distinguished themselves. It is said that they had a travelling medicine-chest with them, with which they willingly and gratuitously cured the sick; and so earnest were they in this, that whenever they heard of any one being ill they hastened to render medical aid, unmindful of either time or weather."

It is very satisfactory to find that the good name of the brotherhood was so well supported by "John Brown & Co.;" but the writer goes on to regret that the investigation of the country should be left to strangers. He points out that the trade and produce of the western parts of the Government of Archangel is already mainly in foreign hands; and, fearing a similar result in the north-east, he concludes:—

“All these expeditions and explorations of natural resources are not without a purpose! In 1873, the Petchora was visited by Austrian travellers under Wilchek, in 1875–6 by the English zoologists; and now the advent of the English merchants Bell and Gardins is expected, arising solely from John Brown & Co.’s expedition Why do Russian naturalists not care for the Petchora? So many foreigners—scientific men and merchants—visit the country, and no Russians; it is strange!”

The discovery of *Anthus gustavi* and *Phylloscopus tristis* in the Petchora country is of course quite sufficient to account for this impending rush of British traders.

I am, &c.,

EDWARD R. ALSTON.

London, May 26, 1877.

SIR,—I send you the following notes, trusting they will interest the readers of ‘The Ibis.’

I have recently received from a gentleman temporarily stationed in the mountains of upper Colorado the very interesting nest and eggs of *Dendræca auduboni*. It is only the second nest of this bird of which any record has been made, and differs from the first in many respects: it also shows the most eastern and southern point to which the bird has been traced in the breeding-season. The nest was taken and the parentage of the eggs identified by Mr. Edward Carter, a gentleman investigating the ornithology of upper Colorado, near Breckenridge Pass in Summit County.

The two eggs I have, from a set of five, are said to represent the extremes in their markings. They are, however, very much alike. Their ground-colour is a very light green or greenish white. One is spotted and blotched, only about the larger end, with a wreath of mingled shadings of very light lilac, purple, and brown, the extreme ends having a circle nearly bare of spots; a waving line of umber, almost black in its integrity, extends almost entirely round the egg, just within the corona; and there are a few minute dots of the same. The other egg has a similar crown, but none of the

umber lines or dots, but has a few light-lilac dots scattered over the rest of its surface. They are of a rounded oval shape, and measure $\cdot 70$ by $\cdot 58$ of an inch.

The nest was in a grove of pines bordering the river-bottom, and well concealed in the fork of a horizontal limb, and about eight feet from the ground. No description can do justice to the elaboration and artistic elegance of its construction. It is large for the bird, being $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by $2\frac{3}{4}$ wide; and the hollow is 2 inches deep by $2\frac{1}{4}$ wide, the walls varying from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch in thickness. The framework is beautifully wrought of fine vegetable stems and roots, into which are woven the feathers of various birds, those of the winter plumage of *Lagopus leucurus* being most conspicuous, and in strong contrast with the sooty feathers of the *Calamospiza bicolor*.

Neither its eggs nor its nest have any resemblance to those of *D. coronata*, as one would naturally expect to see. Mr. Hepburn found a single nest built in the forked branches of a small shrub; but he states that they generally frequent high trees and construct their nests in the upper branches.

The bird is very abundant in Montana, in Washington Territory, and parts of Oregon; Dr. Cooper thinks they breed in the higher Sierra-Nevada, and, Dr. Coues also believes, as far south as the mountains of Arizona.

In the absence of large blotches scattered over the egg generally, in the paleness of its marking, and in the general lightness of its coloring, this egg bears no resemblance to the egg of any other species of this genus that I have ever met with.

I am yours &c.,

T. M. BREWER.

Boston, U. S.

April 27, 1877.

SIR,—Mr. Yarrell, in his 'British Birds' (1st ed.), writing of the Long-tailed Duck, says that in the male bird there are "four window-like apertures" at the bottom of the trachea; but in his vignettes five are represented (B. B. iii. p. 261);

and in several specimens prepared by me there have been five. Five must therefore be considered the normal number. Comparing his vignettes of the tracheal enlargements in the Duck-tribe with the specimens which I have prepared, I have only in a few instances found mine to differ from his. Perhaps the most difference I have observed is in the Shel-duck, the lobes in mine being a good deal larger than they were apparently in his; but it is possible that his picture may have been purposely done on a small scale.

In allied species of Ducks, where the outward marks of shape and colour conform, one would naturally expect a conformity of trachea; but any naturalist who has dissected birds can at once lay his hand on a remarkable exception.

The Garganey and Teal are very near cousins; but the Garganey's windpipe in no way resembles a Teal's; it is vastly larger in the labyrinth. In a specimen now before me this labyrinth, or cartilaginous box, if one may so term it, measures $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in circumference, whereas in a Teal the same part measures only $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch; yet neither of these specimens was selected as being unusually large or small.

J. H. GURNEY, Jun.,

Northrepps Cottage, Norwich.

May 12, 1877.

SIRS,—A few months ago I had an opportunity of examining a large collection of *Phylloscopi* which had been lent to my friend Mr. Seebohm by different collectors. One bird in particular attracted my attention.

It belonged to the collection of Von Homeyer, and was labelled "*Phylloscopus middendorffi* ♂ juv., Tjabuk, 16th August 1872:" on the back of the label was, "Ural, No. 9."

I found it to be, beyond all doubt, *Phylloscopus viridanus* of Blyth in its first plumage, before the slight wing-bar loses its colour and becomes whitish. Two of my examples that I had with me, early autumn birds, matched it most perfectly.

The southern part of the Ural Mountains is in Russia in Europe, and does not, like the northern portion, form the boundary between Europe and Asia; and this being the case,

Tjabuk must be in Europe. It must be a little-known place; for none of the maps that I have seen show it. In Mr. Dresser's 'Birds of Europe,' part 38, and under the head of *Hypolais caligata*, I find the place referred to as being in the South-eastern Ural.

I think the species ought to be added to the European list.

An addition may be also made to the Asiatic list; for I have seen an example of *Acrocephalus turdoides* obtained by Capt. Henry St. John, R.N., in China.

The length of its wing is 3.65. The wing of *A. orientalis* is generally about 3.25 inches long.

The form of the wing of the Chinese example above referred to agrees perfectly with that of an Astracan example I have, the second primary being almost as long as the third (which is the longest) and much longer than the fourth. In the allied Eastern species *A. stentorius* (*A. brunnescens*), the second primary is about the same length as the fifth, and is often between the fifth and sixth.

It would be impossible to separate undersized examples of *A. turdoides* from large ones of *A. orientalis* by appearance only. There may be differences of voice, song, nest, and eggs; but of these I have not any knowledge.

The nest of *A. stentorius* is a deep cup, substantially built of grass and long leaves of water-plants, and is firmly attached to a few reeds, like the nest of *A. streperus*. It is generally placed about eighteen inches above the surface of the water. The eggs are very similar to those of its European ally. It breeds plentifully around the lakes of Cashmere, where I found several nests. I did not see any other Reed-Warbler about these lakes.

Yours &c.,

W. EDWIN BROOKS.

29 May, 1877.

SIRS,—Having recently had an opportunity of inspecting, in the Gardens of the Zoological Society, the interesting Falcon taken off Socotra (mentioned *anteà*, p. 149) I trouble you with the following remarks respecting it.

The bird is still in immature plumage; and until after its next moult it will, I think, be impossible to determine (except by dissection in case of death) whether it is a male of *Falco peregrinus* or a female of either *F. barbarus* or *F. minor*; but I am decidedly of opinion that it is not an example of *F. peregrinator*, as that species, when in immature dress, always has, so far as I have observed, the longitudinal dark marks on the breast and abdomen narrower than they are in this specimen, and the paler interspaces decidedly tinged with rufous.

I am, &c.,

J. H. GURNEY.

SIRS,—In the last number of 'The Ibis' (*anteà*, p. 164) Mr. Seebohm gives a detailed description of the rufous-tailed Shrike, which has been shot on Heligoland. After having examined the specimen and collated with other skins, he says, "I submit that the Heligoland bird is *Lanius isabellinus*, Hempr. & Ehr. (1828), = *L. arenarius*, Blyth (1846), = *L. phænicuroides*, Sev. (1876)."

I have not had the pleasure of examining this Heligoland Shrike; but I have received, by the kindness of Mr. Gaetke, a longer description, which I have published (*Journ. für Ornithologie*, 1875), and from which I suppose the bird not to be *Lanius phænicurus*, Pall., but a nearly allied species, probably *L. phænicuroides* of Severtzoff. In identifying the Heligoland Shrike with *L. isabellinus*, Hempr. & Ehr., Mr. Seebohm is perhaps right; but in identifying this last-named bird with *L. phænicuroides*, Sev., he is not right. These two Shrikes are nearly allied, but not the same. In a little account of the genus *Otomela*, Bp. (*Journ. für Ornithologie*, 1875), I have referred to the specific differences between these rufous-tailed Shrikes. The examination of the large series of *L. isabellinus* and *L. phænicuroides* which Mr. Modest Bogdanow has collected in Turkestan has confirmed my opinion.

I am, &c.,

H. SCHALOW.

Berlin, N., Nieder-Schönhausen,
6th June, 1877.

SIRS,—Mr. Gould, in part xxix. of ‘The Birds of Asia,’ treating of *Sturnus unicolor*, quotes from part xxvi. of Dresser’s work ‘The Birds of Europe’ a passage where it is said that *Sturnus unicolor* is “common in Italy.” This is not exactly the case; and I suppose that Dresser, by a *lapsus calami*, wrote “Italy” instead of “Sardinia.” When I wrote my work on the Birds of Italy I did not know of any instance of *S. unicolor* having been met with in the Italian peninsula; but since then I heard from my friend the Marquis G. Doria, of Genoa, that in 1867 two specimens of it, caught near Genoa, had come into his hands. In any case the appearance of *S. unicolor* in Italy is quite accidental, while both in Sardinia and in Sicily *S. unicolor* is a common and stationary bird.

I am, yours &c.,

T. SALVADORI.

Zoological Museum,
Turin, June 8th, 1877.

Roraima and its Mysteries.—The ‘Spectator’ speaks very appositely of Roraima, in noticing Mr. Brown’s recent work (see *anteà*, p. 239):—

“One of the greatest marvels and mysteries of the earth lies on the outskirts of one of our own colonies; and we leave the mystery unsolved, the marvel uncared for! A great table of pink and white and red sandstone, ‘interbedded with red shale,’ rises from a height of 5100 feet above the level of the sea, 2000 feet sheer into the sapphire tropical sky. A forest crowns it; the highest waterfall in the world tumbles from its summit, 2000 feet at one leap. As far as I can make out, only two parties of civilized explorers have touched the base of the table—Sir Robert Schomburgk many years ago, Mr. Brown and a companion in 1869—each at different spots. Mr. Brown cannot help speculating whether the remains of a former creation may not be found at the top. At any rate, there is the forest on the summit. Of what trees is it composed? They cannot well be the same as those at the base For millenniums this island of sandstone must have had its own distinct flora. What may be its fauna? Very

few birds probably ascend to a height of 2000 feet in the air, the vulture tribe excepted. Nearly the whole of its animated inhabitants are likely to be as distinct as its plants. Is it peopled with human beings? Who can tell? Why not? The summit, Mr. Brown says, is inaccessible, except by means of balloons. Well, that is a question to be settled on the spot between an engineer and a first-rate 'Alpine' But put it that a balloon is required, surely it would be worth while for one of our scientific societies to organize a balloon expedition for the purpose. No one can tell what problems in natural science might not be elucidated. We have here an area of limited extent, within which the secular variation of species by natural selection, if any, must have gone on undisturbed since, at least, the very beginning of the present age in the world's life. Can there be a fairer field for the testing of those theories which are occupying men's minds so much in our days?"

We hear with great pleasure that a young ornithologist, already known to fame (Mr. Everard F. im Thurn), has received the appointment of Director of the Natural-History Museum at Georgetown, Demerara, with liberty to travel and explore for a certain portion of the year. We trust he will turn his attention to the mysteries of Roraima.

Translation of Müller's Memoir on the Voice-organ of the Passeres.—We are glad to be able to announce the approaching publication, by the Delegates of the Oxford University Press, of a translation, by Mr. Bell, of Müller's Classical Essay upon the organs of voice of the Passeres. Prof. Garrod has undertaken to supply a series of notes to bring the work up to the level of our present knowledge of this important subject. The Academy of Berlin has most liberally granted the use of the original copper-plates, to which, however, we believe, additions will be made.
